

# Board candidates discuss goals for district

By Susan Buck  
staff writer

Goal-setting, criticisms and philo-

sophical differences were discussed Monday at a local candidates forum at O.E. Dunkel Middle School in Farmington Hills.

The forum was sponsored by the League of Women Voters and the Farmington chapter of the American Association of University Women.

Richard DeVries, a Ford Motor Co. engineer, and Laura Myers, a bookkeeper, face incumbent Susan Rennels, a bank executive, on June 10 as the three vie for one four-year term on the non-partisan Farmington Community Schools board of education.

Only Myers is not a college graduate. Both Myers and DeVries also ran in last year's school board race.

"I am open and honest about my decisions," Myers said in response to a question about goal-setting. "You will know what I am thinking."

She emphasized listening to parents and residents who come to meetings to speak.

Rennels said that her record of more than eight years shows that she can effectively involve community members in the school as well as parents and teachers.

DeVries said that he wants to set the district's goals in measurable terms, hold the line on property tax increases and make better use of

money already available.

Whether or not board members should have children in the district was an early question. Rennels said that this should not be consideration because 75 percent of Farmington and Farmington Hills residents do not have children in the district.

DeVries pointed out that six out of seven school board trustees do not have children in the district. While it is not required for them to have school-age children, DeVries feels the board should have a better balance and more diversity.

Myers said school board members should do their best to represent the entire community.

Regarding their most serious criticisms, DeVries said that the district needs better assessment procedures for better accountability, a more individualized curriculum and better goal-setting.

MYERS WANTS a long-range master plan similar to the Farmington Hills master plan.

Rennels said that the district simply needs to catch its breath. "People who have moved into the school district in the last five years cannot appreciate the pressure the school district is under," she said.

Rennels also wants to see more long-range planning and curriculum improvement.

Awarding extra credit honor points for advanced placement classes was another issue. Rennels said that this was studied for 18 months in order to help college-bound students to take more classes.

DeVries and Myers both said that college admissions offices take advanced placement classes into account and factor that in.

In reference to the middle school redistricting study, DeVries said that he was disappointed because the board went with a plan which he said did not receive the same scrutiny as other plans.

Myers, who served on the high school boundary study committee, said that she was unhappy with the entire secondary level boundary study process, designed to come up with ways to relieve school overcrowding, because it did not allow enough time for study.

She did not support any of the middle school plans. Rennels said that the middle school plan adopted was a modification of an existing plan.

REGARDING at-risk and special-needs students, Myers said there needs to be a coordination of community services that are already in place rather than a duplication of services in the school. Rennels said there are federal evaluation standards that must be met. DeVries said

that the solution does not lie in cutting the budget and increasing class size. "You must increase instruction, not decrease it," he said.

DeVries reiterated the need for better assessment methods and for better communication with parents. "Nobody knows the children like their parents," DeVries said.

In response to questions requiring a simple yes or no answer, both Myers and DeVries said the district does not spend enough on instruction, whereas Rennels said it does. The challengers said that the school board does not always comply with the open meetings act. Rennels disagreed.

DeVries said that he felt school board trustees should be limited in the number of terms they serve. Myers and Rennels disagreed.

All three said that they would support an in-service training session for board members.

And all three said they support cablecasting school board meetings. DeVries pointed out that at one time Rennels did not support such broadcasting. Rennels said that she has since come around to the idea, but added that the school board meeting room is quite cramped.

The forum may be seen on cable Channel 12 at 8 p.m. Tuesday, May 28, and at 3 p.m. on Friday, June 7.

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